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# News Release



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## **U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE DETERMINES PEIRSON'S MILK-VETCH SHOULD REMAIN PROTECTED**

Carlsbad, Calif. - The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today it has completed a status review of Peirson's milk-vetch. The Service has concluded the plant should remain listed under the Endangered Species Act.

The status review was undertaken after the Service determined that a petition to remove Peirson's milk-vetch (*Astragalus magdalenae* var. *peirsonii*) from Endangered Species Act protection provided substantial information.

After reviewing all of the available information about Peirson's milk-vetch, the Service concluded that it remains threatened by habitat destruction and modification from off-highway vehicle use; ongoing predation by bruchid beetles; the inadequacy of existing regulatory protections; and susceptibility to rangewide population declines from natural and manmade factors, including vandalism and drought.

During the status review the Service opened a 60-day comment period to accept public information and data about the plant and its habitat. A group of experts was also contacted to provide peer review of the information in the petition.

“Based on a thorough review of all information and data, and peer review comments, the Service concluded that Peirson's milk-vetch should remain listed as threatened under the Act,” said Steve Thompson, Manager of the Service's California-Nevada Operations Office.

The petition to remove Peirson's milk-vetch from the Federal list of threatened and endangered species was submitted to the Service in October 2001 by representatives of the law firm Procopio, Cory, Hargreaves & Savitch, on behalf of the American Sand Association, San Diego Off-Road Coalition, and the Off-Road Business Association.

Petitioners cited several reasons why the plant should be removed from protection under the Act, including assertions that:

- data used to list the species were in error,
- new information indicates healthy populations of the plant are found throughout the Algodones Dunes, and
- the listing did not take into account conservation measures associated with the passage of the California Desert Protection Act.

Peirson's milk-vetch, a member of the pea family, grows from 8 to 27 inches tall and has pale purple flowers. In the United States, the plant is found only in portions of the Algodones Dunes, a southern California sand dune formation that is about 40 miles long, running from the northwest to the southeast, and approximately 5 to 8 miles wide. Within the dunes, the plant is found in scattered occurrences based on the slope of the dunes, patterns of annual rainfall, and other habitat factors.

The Service listed Peirson's milk-vetch as a Federally threatened species in 1998 due to habitat degradation, impacts associated with off-road vehicles, and inadequate regulations to conserve the plant.

Peirson's milk-vetch germination is closely linked to annual rainfall patterns within the Algodones Dunes. The plant generally produces flowers and sets seed between late fall and May. This is also the time of year when the dunes are most heavily visited by off-road vehicle users. Data indicate that the ongoing, annual co-occurrence of heavy off-road vehicle use during Peirson's milk-vetch germination/seed production season is affecting the long-term viability of the plant.

The Service will continue working with the Bureau of Land Management on issues relating to conservation of Peirson's milk-vetch within the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area. Currently, the Service is reviewing its biological opinion on the BLM's Recreation Area Management Plan and the effect the plan has on Peirson's milk-vetch.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to State fish and wildlife agencies.

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